

FAITH.

BY EUGÈNE BERSIER.

Let us consider the true character of the Christian faith. It is not a simple belief, nor an abdication of ourselves; it is a movement of the whole soul, intelligence, heart, and will, by which we seize the invisible God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ. To show what faith is, is to answer, once for all, those who say to us, What is the good of faith?

What good, do you ask? Who are you who propose such a question? Has the fearful problem of your destiny never presented itself before you? Have you never asked whither the current of the years was bearing you—whether towards final extinction or towards life eternal? Have you never trembled before this unknown which surrounds us and oppresses us? Have you never heard in the silence of the night the voice of your conscience recalling your past life, your transgression, your cowardice, your sin? Has the thought of the holy God never troubled you? Have you never suffered? Have you never wished to know if your life were a play, a miserable or amusing enigma which should dissolve in a night? Have you never felt yourself lost in the world, in the midst of this conflict of egoisms which compose its life; and has it not seemed to you then that the cries of your heart awakened no more than an ironical echo? Have you never wished to wrest from the unknown its mystery, and to demand of it if love is a vain dream, and if the heart of God does palpitate in the infinitude of the heavens? Have you never seen others suffer? Does your conscience maintain its calm in face of the iniquities which form the tissue of history, have you never wished to know what would be the last word of all this? Have you never seen death, and has death seemed to you natural? Have you regarded with the dry eye of the fatalist the child whom

God has given you writhing in the anguish of the last agony? What!—this world suffices you! What!—the present life is so full of interests and charms for you that the thought of your eternal future never obtrudes itself! What!—all these problems of death, of sin, and of suffering leave you calm and indifferent, and you say, What is the good of faith?

What good? You have a right to say this word if to these questions you have found a response, if over these obscurities your reason has thrown some light; but this response and this light, you have them not. Reason! ah, we know her greatness. To her, the visible world which belongs to her, and which submits itself to her day by day; to her, the globe which she covers with bands of iron over which civilisation passes triumphant; to her, the depths of the earth from which she extracts heat, light, and life; to her, matter which she transforms; to her, the infinite spaces of the heavens which she measures with an inflexible precision. Truly is it great and sovereign, this reason of man in its audacious flights, but how insufficient and poor when man demands of it a response to the aspirations of his conscience and of his heart. What has reason to say to the troubled conscience which feels itself culpable? What says it to the torn heart? What says it to you, O philosopher, when the hour of death approaches? Ah! you can multiply then your penetrating analyses, you can show us in the human organism the nerve which transmits the thought becoming deadened under the influence of the brain which receives it, the blood which grows heavy in the arteries, and has no more force to mount to the failing heart; you can tell us then that life is escaping. But this life, what becomes of it? This being which, one instant ago, loved, prayed, hoped, into what regions has it passed? You know nothing about it. You have not to give me, after so many ages of research, a single certitude, one word of light and of peace, or even of hope . . . and you say, What is the good of faith? What good? Let them ask whom this bitter reality satisfies. We are taught to believe to-day, more and more, that mankind has advanced; that men may leave vain theories, deceiving aspirations, that they need care no more for a world beyond, and that they must henceforth limit their ambition, confine themselves to the present which they know, beautify and embellish their passing dwelling-place, and gather all the happiness which the earth can yield them. But once

more, who are they who speak to us thus? What right have they to pretend to represent humanity? What! Shall this be the last word of the human soul—to shut itself up in the present, renouncing hope and belief! To shut itself up, and why? In order to play? Who would be able to play in the face of such tremendous issues? And, if any could, is the foolishness of childish play to be the miserable end of the history of humanity? Or is it in obedience to duty that men must limit themselves to the present? What is duty without a just judge, a future sanction, a life eternal? In this prison where you would confine me, and whence you would wall off all escape, all issue towards the heavens, you tell me that my greatness consists in making myself my own gaoler! Ah, well! against this mockery of greatness I protest in the name of my nature, in the name of my soul, in the name of my conscience. I understand that these insensate theories can amuse the philosophers in their schools, or serve the ends of passing incredulity, but I appeal to man, such as he appears to me in the profound and true instincts of his nature; to man, such as I find him to be in myself; to the man who sins and who suffers; and I say that to this man is necessary light, consolation, hope, and that rather than believe nothing he will believe everything, even to the absurd and the monstrous.

It is necessary, then, that I believe. I have proved it. In whom shall I believe? To this question I reply, with Saint Paul, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ? and why? Yes, why? Here all is serious. To believe is to confide oneself. I must know to whom I would confide the destinies of my soul. It is my whole future which I am about to suspend on the word of a man; it is the most intimate life of my heart; it is my eternal hopes. And what if I deceive myself, if I find that I have built upon sand, if, one day, the whole interior edifice of my life should crumble to dust! It is necessary to see clearly here; no illusion, no scaffolding of the imagination, no effervescence. I may die to-morrow. Why do I believe in Jesus Christ? Why? Let me try to give the answer in a few words; let me repeat the confessions of millions of adorers who, during eighteen centuries, have been able to cry with Saint Paul, "I know in whom I have believed."

In whom shall I believe? said I, out of the depth of my

darkness; and I saw present himself before me the Son of man. Alone among men, he said, "I know from whence I come, and I know whither I go." He alone, without hesitation, with a sovereign authority, shows what is the way which leads to God. He speaks of heaven as one who has come from there. "I am from above and you are from below," said he to the children of men. Above all and always, he proclaims himself as the messenger of the Father, as his only Son, as the Master of souls. I have heard his word; it had an accent unfamiliar, which recalled no human word; beautiful with a simplicity to which nothing approaches, it exercises a power with which nothing can compare. What is the secret of this power? Neither convincing argument nor human eloquence, but the radiance of the truth penetrating the heart and the conscience. In listening to this voice I have felt my heart seized, I have yielded to this authority so strong and so gentle; even while he speaks it seems to me that heaven opens and discloses itself before my eyes. I contemplate God, such as He is; I see man, such as he ought to be. An irresistible adhesion to this teaching mounts from my heart to my lips, and with Simon Peter I cry, "To whom can we go except to thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Was it my soul only which vibrated to this word? I look around me and see, hanging on the lips of Christ, a multitude always increasing, gathered out of all places, from among all conditions of men; there are the poor and the rich, the ignorant and the learned, children and the aged, souls pure and souls soiled; and all, as I, seized by this word, find in it, as I, light, certitude, peace. I see, above all, flow thither those who suffer and who weep, those who, most of all, feel the emptiness of mere words, those for whom illusion is impossible. I see them weep, but their tears are no longer bitter; something of heavenly peace shines in their regards; for the first time they are consoled.

But is this impression sufficient? Can I allow my entire destiny to depend on any word of man, and have I not the right to demand of him who thus draws me in his footsteps what are his titles to my confidence, and how will he prove to me that he comes from God? "O thou who callest thyself the witness of God, thou who speakest to us of heaven as if it had been thy dwelling-place, thou who illuminest before our eyes

the mystery of death, thou who pardonest sin, show us that thou art he who should come." To this demand of our soul Jesus Christ has answered.

We ask him if he has come from God, and he has done before us the works of God; I speak not of his miracles, inexplicable though they still be in their simple grandeur, in their sublime spirituality, in that, I know not what, of truth which marks them of an inimitable stamp. Jesus has done more than miracles, he has revealed God in his person; the proof of his divine mission, he has given it in his life. In him I see sanctity realised. In vain envy, dogging his steps as in the days of his flesh, has essayed to discover in his life a single blot; in vain humanity, in its incessant progress towards a superior morality, has often thought to surpass him; in vain the critic, trying to surprise a fault in this great life, turns all ways, and is, to-day, more than ever bitter in his attacks; notwithstanding the furious assaults of envy and malice, this life still rises before us as the ideal of goodness. Here is a holiness before which conscience feels itself accused and judged. The more I contemplate it, the more I experience a sentiment of adoration and of profound humiliation, and when any would attempt to explain this life to me, to show me that it is an invention of men, I protest. I feel that all such explanations are miserable subterfuges. Then, by an irresistible logic, I feel that if Christ is holy, he ought to have spoken truth, and he ought to be believed. What! this life, unexplained and inexplicable, this life in which all save the very fanatics of incredulity see the most splendid effusion of the divine which this earth has contemplated, this life which raises morality to the sublime height of love sacrificed on the Cross, is such a life as this to lend its support to erring words, whether deceiving or deceived? Never can I admit it. Thus, upon the double testimony of a word and of a life alike resplendent in their divinity, my faith fortifies itself; the more I contemplate Jesus Christ, the more am I able to say, I know in whom I have believed.

Is this all? Yes, if I have need of no more than light and certitude; but there is in my soul an instinct more profound, more ardent, more irresistible still: I feel myself culpable; I thirst for pardon and for safety. Behold, when I question myself, that which pushes me to the feet of Jesus Christ; in him it is not, before all, the Master, it is the Saviour whom I

bless and whom I adore; if his word draws me, it is his Cross which vanquishes me. Ask of Saint Paul why he can say, "I know in whom I have believed," and what has made of him a witness, a martyr, an apostle of Jesus Christ. He would say to you, "It is his mercy, as I see it shine from his Cross." Saint Paul felt himself a sinner, condemned by his own conscience; he sought safety through his works; he exhausted himself in this miserable struggle; he found safety only in the Cross. There he saw, to use his own words, the just suffer for the unjust, the holy supporting the malediction of sin. In this redeeming sacrifice Saint Paul found the peace of his conscience; the love of God, as he recognised it in Jesus Christ, penetrated his heart and life. Does it not appear in all his epistles, in all his apostleship? Is it not that which inspires him, which glorifies his whole life; is it not that which dictates to him this word, "I know in whom I have believed"?

Here we reach the profoundest depth of the Christian faith; here is what millions of souls have found in Jesus Christ, conducted, as was Saint Paul, to the foot of the Cross by the sentiment of their misery; here is what has transformed them, torn them from themselves, conquered for ever by Jesus Christ. See you by what universal instinct they come to their crucified Saviour, with what happiness they contemplate him. There is for them pardon, reconciliation; there, they see the love of God in its magnificence; and when this love has changed them, when it has become in them the principle of a new existence, would you have them doubt of that which is written in the depths of their most intimate being, of that which is the very source of their satisfaction and their peace?

Is this all? you ask me yet again. No, my brother; and wherefore? it is that beyond all I am able to say, better than all I am able to express of the reasons of our faith, there is that which escapes me. Say, if you can, why you believe in Jesus Christ; tell the impressions which the Gospel produces on you; tell the secret emotions which it reveals in your soul. There remain things which cannot be expressed! In the great moments of the life of the heart one feels that all speech is powerless; there are impressions which cannot be analysed. Were we to recount the secret history of the Christian soul, no doubt the world would smile. Mysticism! it would cry; and how prove to it that which it has never experienced. For the

Christian, however, in proportion as he advances, are the proofs of his faith, which for him require no support from the first. The intimate experience of his heart in which he is able to recognise ever more fully the truth of the divine word and its marvellous adaptation to human nature, sorrowful deceptions which detach him from the world and turn his regards all the more to the beauty of the eternal realities, the crumbling away of systems which seem as though they must replace the Gospel for ever, but which leave behind them only a void the more complete, only a disenchantment the more bitter; intelligence more complete of the plan of God and of His hidden ways, answered prayers, unexpected deliverances, sweetness mingled with the most severe experiences, intimate consolations, ineffable visitations from on high,—do you not recognise all this, my brother? Is it not out of such experiences you would often repeat with most profound conviction, “I know in whom I have believed”?

THE FÉSOLE CLUB PAPERS.

BY W. G. COLLINGWOOD.

X.—INFINITY.

In one respect the *Parents' Review* should commend itself to the antiquarian mind, because, like the most venerable pre-historic civilisations, it begins its year with the vernal equinox, and brings out the first of its zodiacal twelve in March. And so our first club year closes with this article. Some promise was made at starting of a prize, to be competed for by the members, and judged by a well-known artist. And that promise we mean to keep. In order that the second year's course may start fair in March, the competition drawings should be sent in to the writer not later than the last of February. Any subject may be chosen that will best display the competitor's powers; the prize will be awarded to the best work, irrespective of size, subject, or style. But the drawings must have been done within this month of February, and specially for the purpose of this competition. It would be obviously unfair if by any chance some member were to submit a drawing which was the result of long labour or happy inspiration, directed, or perhaps assisted, by a teacher. We want this month to take stock of our progress, to test our powers, and prizes and praises are nothing to the person who has obeyed that wisest of maxims, “Know thyself.”

An infinite problem. We may partly know ourselves, as we may partly know anything else. But infinity means getting all round a subject, and finding that it has no end, that it has no beginning, that it can only be symbolised by that ancient snake of mythology, with its tail in its mouth.

In common language we misuse the word *infinite*. The image it presents to our minds is that of a ladder, up which we toil step by step, only to find that another step is ever beyond us. That is not infinity; that is repetition. We *must* drop off